

CRITICAL THINKING QURANIC STUDIES TEXTBOOK YEAR 1

LALEH BAKHTIAR

CRITICAL THINKING
AND THE
CHRONOLOGICAL QURAN
IN THE
LIFE OF PROPHET MUHAMMAD

THE YEAR
1
OF THE REVELATION
(13 BH/610 CE)

REVISED EDITION

INTRODUCTION BY
MOHAMMAD HASHIM KAMALI

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LESSON 97(1). CRITICAL THINKING STRATEGY ANALYZING OR EVALUATING ACTIONS

You should evaluate your actions in regard to Prophets of the past.

QURANIC CHAPTER 55: THE MERCIFUL (AL-RAHMAN) SIGNS 55:1-55:25

Madinah: The Merciful. (55:1)
He taught the Quran. (55:2)
He created the human being. (55:3)
He taught him the clear explanation. (55:4)
The sun and the moon are to keep count. (55:5)
And the stars and the trees both prostrate. (55:6)
And the heaven He exalted. And He set in place the Balance (55:7)
that you be not defiant in the Balance. (55:8)
Set up the weighing with justice
and skimp not in the Balance. (55:9)
And He set the earth in place for the human race. (55:10)
On and in it are many kinds of sweet fruit
and date palm trees with sheathed fruit trees (55:11)
and grain possessor of husks and fragrant herbs. (55:12)
So which of the benefits of the Lord
of you both will you both deny? (55:13)
He created the human being
from earth mud like potter's clay. (55:14)
He created the ones who are spirits
from a smokeless flame of fire. (55:15)
So which of the benefits of the Lord
of you both will you both deny? (55:16)
The Lord of the Two Easts, and the Lord of the Two Wests! (55:17)
So which of the benefits of the Lord
of you both will you both deny? (55:18)
He let forth the two seas to meet one another. (55:19)
Between them is a barrier which they wrong not. (55:20)
So which of the benefits of the Lord
of you both will you both deny? (55:21)
From both of them go forth pearls and coral. (55:22)
So which of the benefits of the Lord
of you both will you both deny? (55:23)
His are ones that run
with that which is displayed in the sea like landmarks. (55:24)
So which of the benefits of the Lord
of you both will you both deny? (55:25)

COMMENTARY^o

It is the Merciful who has taught the Quran. The Merciful created the human being and taught him to articulate thought and speech. The sun and the moon function in due measure. The stars and the trees prostrate themselves before God. He has raised the skies high, and has set the balance, so that you may not exceed the balance. Weigh, therefore, with justice and do not fall short in the balance. He has laid the earth for His creatures, with all its fruits, its palm trees with sheathed clusters, its husked grain and its sweet-smelling plants. Which, then, of your Lords blessings do you both deny? (55:1-13)

We now turn back to the earth and its waters, which God has made in exact measure that determines quantity, type, how it runs and how it is used. He has given freedom to the two great bodies of water, so that they may meet; yet between them is a barrier which they do not cross. Which, then, of your Lords blessings do you both deny? (55:19-55:25)

The two bodies of water, expressed in the Arabic text as the two seas, are in fact the salty bodies of water including seas and oceans and the un-salty ones or rivers. God left them free to run and to meet, but did not allow them to exceed their limits. Each will fulfil its own function. In between them there is a barrier of the same nature, which God has put in place. The quantities of water on earth are not the result of any coincidence; they are determined by exact measure. Salty waters cover three-quarters of the earth's surface and they are mostly connected, while dry land represents only about one quarter of the earth. This very large quantity of salty water is the amount needed to keep the earth's atmosphere clean and suitable for supporting life.

STUDENT ASSESSMENT

EXAMPLE OF HOW CRITICAL THINKING WORKS

Whenever we think, we think for a **purpose** within a **point of view** based on **assumptions** leading to **implications** (consequences). We use **vocabulary** (concepts, ideas and theories) to **interpret facts** (data, evidence and experiences) in order to answer **questions**, (solve problems, and resolve issues).

EXAMPLE OF HOW QURANIC CRITICAL THINKING WORKS

Analyze the following paragraph and determine:

1. What is the **Purpose** of the thoughts in this paragraph?
2. What is the **Question(s)**?
3. What **Information** are you given?
4. Based on your question, how would you **Interpret** the information?

5. What is(are) the **Concept(s)**?
6. What is (are) the **Assumption(s)**?
7. What is (are) the **Implication(s)**?
8. What is its **Point of View**?

Analyze what is being denied of the blessings of God.

Answer the following questions.

What information are the ones who only believe in what was caused to descend to them using?

Where did they get that information?

What information is given about them?

What does this remind you of? Why?

How are the interpretations similar? Different?

How important are the differences? Why?

What does this tell us about our topic?

How useful is that comparison?

Can anyone think of an even more useful comparison?

What is the meaning behind the information given in the above signs?

What is the Quranic response to their assumption?

LESSON 97(2). CRITICAL THINKING STRATEGY

DISTINGUISHING RELEVANT FROM IRRELEVANT INFORMATION

DEVELOPING SENSITIVITY TO RELEVANCE

You can then discover that sometimes you must argue for the relevance of a particular fact to an issue. Another technique for developing your sensitivity to relevance is to change an issue slightly and compare what was relevant to the first issue to what is relevant to the second. You could read the section and signs with one or more issues in mind and note relevant details. You could then share and discuss your lists. You can then discover that sometimes you must argue for the relevance of a particular fact to an issue. You may assume that they have to use all information they are given to ask a question. You need to learn how to limit your responses with only the relevant facts. Implications are deduced from information after the information is interpreted and given a meaning.

Learn to distinguish relevant from irrelevant facts. This is not always clear and, therefore, should be part of a classroom discussion. You should also be aware that a fact that is relevant for one situation may not be relevant to a different one.

When discussing an issue, solution to a problem, or when giving reasons for a conclusion, you can practice limiting your remarks to facts which are relevant to that or conclusion. Don't assume that all information given has to be used to solve a problem. Life does not sort relevant from irrelevant information for us. Make a case for the pertinence of your remarks, and see when your remarks are irrelevant.

QURANIC CHAPTER 55: THE MERCIFUL (AL-RAHMAN)

SIGNS 55:26-55:45

Madinah: *All who are in or on it are ones
who are being annihilated, (55:26)
yet the Countenance of thy Lord will remain forever,
Possessor of The Majesty and The Splendor. (55:27)
So which of the benefits of the Lord
of you both will you both deny? (55:28)
Of Him asks whoever is in the heavens and in and on the earth.
Every day He is on some matter. (55:29)
So which of the benefits of the Lord
of you both will you both deny? (55:30)
We will attend to you at leisure, O you two dependents. (55:31)
So which of the benefits of the Lord
of you both will you both deny? (55:32)
O you both, assembly of jinn and humankind!
If you were able to pass through the areas of the heavens*

*and the earth, then, pass through them!
But you will not pass through, but with an authority. (55:33)
So which of the benefits of the Lord
of you both will you both deny? (55:34
There will be sent against you both a flame of fire
and heated brass. Will you not, then, help yourselves? (55:35)
So which of the benefits of the Lord
of you both will you both deny? (55:36
Then, when the heaven was split then
it had been crimson like red leather, (55:37)
so which of the benefits of the Lord
of you both will you both deny? (55:38)
On that Day no one will be asked about his impiety
neither humankind nor ones who are spirits. (55:39)
So which of the benefits of the Lord
of you both will you both deny? (55:40)
Ones who sin will be recognized by their mark
and they will be taken by their forelocks and their feet. (55:41)
So which of the benefits of the Lord
of you both will you both deny? (55:42)
This is hell which the ones who sin deny! (55:43)
They will go around between it
and between scalding boiling water! (55:44)
So which of the benefits of the Lord
of you both will you both deny? (55:45)*

COMMENTARY^o

Having taken us on this round in the great universe, referring to different types of creatures that will inevitably die, the chapter now mentions the only One who is eternal, and to whom all glory and majesty belong. As we see death overtaking all creatures, we are conscious of the truth of God, the Eternal: All that lives on it perishes; but forever will remain the face of your Lord full of majesty, granting grace. Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny? (55:26-55:28)

All sounds become hushed, breathing faint, and limbs stop moving. The air of death spreads over all living creatures, stopping every move throughout the heavens and earth. Only the majesty of the Eternal face overshadows all creatures, time, place and the entire universe. Human expression cannot depict the scene. It cannot add to the Quranic text which gives us a feeling of humble tranquillity, complete silence and total majesty. It paints a scene of total emptiness that leaves the whole universe motionless after it had been bustling

with life. Yet it instills in us an image which we cannot understand from our experience but can comprehend. The same comment is added, as the chapter considers the full understanding of this fact to be one of the blessings humans and jinn are reminded of: **(55:28)**

APPEALS FROM ALL

The truth of God's eternity gives rise to another truth: all creatures are bound to perish and, therefore, they all address everything related to their existence to the One who is without equal, eternal and in control of everything in the universe:

Everyone in heaven and earth entreats Him. Every day He manifests Himself in some wonderful way. **(55:29-55:30)**

A FRIGHTENING THREAT

What a frightening threat that neither human being nor jinn can face. **(55:31-55:36)** Indeed firm mountains, stars and galaxies tremble to hear it. God Almighty, in all His power and majesty, says that He will attend to the reckoning of these two humble creatures, the human being and jinn giving His statement an air of warning! It is unimaginably terrible!

This **(55:39)** applies to a particular situation on that day when all will be present. It is a day with different situations: in some people will be questioned and in some others no question will be put to them. In some, every soul will argue its own case, trying to put the blame on its associates, and in others no word of argument or dispute will be allowed. It is a long, extended day, with many positions and situations, each of which is awesome, and each is witnessed by multitudes of creatures. This verse speaks of a particular situation when no human or jinn will be asked about their sins. Everything is already well known, and the deeds of all are out in the open. Signs of misery appear as black on some faces, and signs of triumph appear white on others. Every face tells of what is going to happen. Can there be any denial on that day?

This **(55:41)** is a scene that combines force with humiliation: forelocks and feet are tied together and the guilty are so cast into hell. Can there be any denial then? As this is going on, the chapter addresses its audience, as if they are witnessing this continuing process of casting the guilty, with their forelocks and feet combined, into hell: **(55:43)** It is present here, as you are now seeing it. **(55:44)** It is exceedingly hot; they have nowhere to go other than round and between the flames and scorching fluids. Look at them as they go round now: **(55:45)** This is all that is said about those enduring this most painful suffering. The chapter then turns its attention to those enjoying honor and bliss.

STUDENT ASSESSMENT

EXAMPLE OF HOW CRITICAL THINKING WORKS

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In determining the difference between relevance, the Quran asks a rhetorical question: Had you been witnesses when God charged you with this way of forbidding certain animals? The Quranic message mentions two kinds of flocks—beasts of burden and those who are for slaughtering. It is God Who provides them. Satan has created nothing. The only prohibitions come from God. To state otherwise is to cause humanity to go astray.

How would you rate yourself? Put a check by the ability you feel confident you have learned.

I understand what a rhetorical question is.

I realize the importance of the Quran saying that no one will bear the results of another person's actions.

It is an important Quranic concept that each person is responsible for their own beliefs and actions.

LESSON 97(3). CRITICAL THINKING STRATEGY GIVING REASONS AND EVALUATING EVIDENCE

Quranic critical thinkers have learned on which evidence to base their conclusion. They can insightfully discuss evidence relevant to the issue or conclusions they consider. They scrutinize and evaluate factual claims.

QURANIC CHAPTER 55: THE MERCIFUL (AL-RAHMAN) SIGNS 55:46-55:78

*Madinah: For him who feared the station before his Lord
are two Gardens. (55:46)
So which of the benefits of the Lord
of you both will you both deny? (55:47)
Possessor of wide shade. (55:48)
So which of the benefits of the Lord
of you both will you both deny? (55:49)
Two springs will be running. (55:50)
So which of the benefits of the Lord
of you both will you both deny? (55:51)
In them both every kind of sweet fruit of diverse pairs. (55:52)
So which of the benefits of the Lord
of you both will you both deny? (55:53)
Ones who are reclining on places of restfulness the inner linings of
which are of brocade. And the fruit plucked from trees while fresh,
that which draws near from the two Gardens. (55:54)
So which of the benefits of the Lord
of you both will you both deny? (55:55)
In them both are ones who are restraining their (f) glance.
No humankind touched them (f) sexually before
nor ones who are spirits. (55:56)
So which of the benefits of the Lord
of you both will you both deny? (55:57)
They are as if they were like rubies and coral. (55:58)
So which of the benefits of the Lord
of you both will you both deny? (55:59)
Is the recompense for kindness other than kindness? (55:60)
So which of the benefits of the Lord
of you both will you both deny? (55:61)
Besides these are two other Gardens. (55:62)
So which of the benefits of the Lord
of you both will you both deny? (55:63)
Dark green. (55:64)
So which of the benefits of the Lord*

of you both will you both deny? (55:65)
In them both are two springs gushing. (55:66)
So which of the benefits of the Lord
of you both will you both deny? (55:67)
In them both are sweet fruits and date palm trees
and pomegranates. (55:68)
So which of the benefits of the Lord
of you both will you both deny? (55:69)
In them both are the good deeds, fairer. (55:70)
So which of the benefits of the Lord
of you both will you both deny? (55:71)
Most beautiful eyed ones who will be restrained in edifices. (55:72)
So which of the benefits of the Lord
of you both will you both deny? (55:73)
No humankind touched them (f) sexually
before nor ones who are spirits. (55:74)
So which of the benefits of the Lord
of you both will you both deny? (55:75)
Ones who are reclining on green pillows
and fairer carpets. (55:76)
So which of the benefits of the Lord
of you both will you both deny? (55:77)
Blessed be the Name of thy Lord,
Possessor of The Majesty and The Splendor. (55:78)

COMMENTARY°

For the first time in the Quran so far two gardens are mentioned, and there are probably more within the great garden of heaven. Their mention here, in particular, may be to stress their importance. In the next chapter, The Inevitable Event, we learn that the dwellers of heaven form two large groups: the ones to the fore who will be brought nearest to God, and the people to the right. Each will experience great bliss. Here also we feel that these two gardens are designated for a group with a high position. It may be the group described in the next chapter as being closest to God. We see another two gardens which are less refined than the first two and we feel that they belong to a group that comes next to the ones already mentioned. This group may be the people to the right. Whatever the case may be, let us look at this first grouping of two gardens, feeling their bliss. They are: (55:48) The Arabic word used for branches conveys in particular newly springing branches that spread an air of freshness. These gardens have: (55:50) Thus, they are never short of water.

Moreover, they are: (55:52) Their fruits are plentiful and varied.

How will the dwellers of these gardens live? (55:54) Such is the lining of their couches: the top is left to our imagination. And then (55:54) It is near and easy to reach.

This, however, does not complete the aspects of luxury that await these people. There is still more to consider: (55:56) Their modest gaze reflects their chastity. They do not look to anyone other than their spouses. Besides, they instil a sense of luxury and brightness, appearing: (55:58)

All this comes as the reward for a person who stands in this life in fear of his Lord's presence and worships Him as if he sees Him. He feels that God sees him and he works to attain the superior grade of excellence that the Prophet described as to worship God as if you see Him. If you do not, then know that He sees you. As such they deserve more from the Lord of Grace for their excellence: (55:60)

In this presentation of these two lofty gardens and what they contain, every aspect of blessing and comfort is followed by the familiar comment: (55:61)

The chapter then describes what the other group, also with two gardens, will have: (55:62) The description shows them to be in some way less than the first two: (55:64) Their green color is very dark, almost black. They have: (55:66) Their water gushes forth, which is again different from, or less than, the flowing water of the springs in the first two gardens. Here we have: (55:68) while we had there: (55:52) Moreover: (55:70) Further aspects are added in the next sign: (55:72) The pavilions, or decorated tents, add connotations of bedouin luxury, gratifying those used to desert life. The mates they have here are sheltered, while the ones in the other two gardens are of modest gaze. However both groups of mates share in the same qualities of chastity and faithful devotion: (55:74)

We see the dwellers of these two gardens enjoying their luxuries: (55:76) The fine quality of the carpets in these gardens is given a special description in Arabic, which is an adjective used of the Abqar Valley; in olden times the Arabs believed this to be the dwelling place of the jinn. Hence they attributed every marvellous thing to this valley, describing it as Abqari, as the carpets are here described. When compared with what the first two gardens contain, these are clearly more modest. Yet the familiar comment is added after every aspect of blessing mentioned here: (55:77)

The chapter concludes with a final note of glorification of the Lord whose face, full of majesty, will remain after all creation has perished. This is the most apt conclusion to a chapter that bears the name of the Lord of Grace: (55:78)

STUDENT ASSESSMENT

EXAMPLE OF HOW CRITICAL THINKING WORKS

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Analyze **6:149-6:150** based on Quranic Critical Thinking criteria.

How would you rate yourself? Put a check by the ability you feel confident you have learned. Do not be discouraged if you feel you have not developed any of these abilities or just a few. It takes practice and hopefully with each lesson, you will improve these abilities:

I tried to find the key concept of the course during the first couple of class meetings.

I was able to relate that definition to each segment of what I learned afterward.

I realized that fundamental ideas are the basis for all others.

LESSON 98(1). CRITICAL THINKING STRATEGY

MAKING INTERPRETATIONS, INFERENCES, CONCLUSIONS

HOW TO APPROACH THE QURAN

Quranic critical readers approach the sacred text with a view to entering a silent dialogue with God. They realize they must actively reconstruct God's meaning. They read because there is much that they know they do not know, much to experience that they have not experienced. Thus, critical readers do not simply pass their eyes over the words with the intention of filling their memories. They question, organize, interpret, synthesize, and digest what they read. They question, not only what was said, but also what was implied and presupposed. They organize the details, not only around key ideas in the work, but also around their own key ideas. They not only conclude, they recognize their conclusions as conclusions, and consider alternative conclusions. •

Recognizing your conclusions as such, you revise and refine them. You do not simply accept or reject; you work to make ideas your own, accepting what makes most sense, rejecting what does not fit your new understanding into their existing frameworks of thought.

WHAT IS AN IMPLICATION, CONCLUSION?

In Quranic Studies you learn to come to conclusions based on conditional reasoning (if ... then ...) given in the particular Quranic signs you are studying where a major general premise combines with a more specific minor premise. As you study the Quranic signs, you should look for information and then separate the information from the conclusion.

To reach a conclusion, respond with your own conception of what you are studying. Place it in the context of your own experience, perspective, point of view, or philosophy. For example, you may conclude from the silence of another person towards you as an expression of hostility. This conclusion may or may not be correct. It may be based on your own patterns of motivation and behavior that you projected onto the other person.

Conclusions should be distinguished from the facts, the evidence, the situation. The best conclusions take the most evidence into account. Critical thinkers recognize the conclusions of the Quranic signs they are studying, distinguish them from evidence, consider alternative interpretations, and reconsider their interpretations in the light of new evidence.

ALL LEARNING INVOLVES:

All learning involves personal interpretation, since whatever you learn you must integrate into your own thinking and action. What you learn must be given a meaning by you, must be meaningful to you, and therefore involves interpretive acts on your part.